

Antonio Maria GENTILI

THE BARNABITES

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BY EMILY L. JEFFERSON

**Manual of history and spirituality
of the Order of Clerics Regular
of St. Paul Beheaded**

Chapter 6

THE CO-FOUNDERS OF THE BARNABITES

Today there is no more argument about the fact that St. Anthony M. Zaccaria was the Founder of the Congregation of the Clerics Regular of St. Paul (the Barnabites). In the first years and sometime during the more than 460 years of the life of the Congregation there was not a clear distinction among the three companions who constituted the beginning of the Order. There was a preference to name, depict and present the three of them always together.

Since 1897, when Pope Leo XIII canonized Anthony M. Zaccaria, his figure has been exalted so much that he has now assumed the Founder's role, relegating Bartolomeo Ferrari and Giacomo Antonio Morigia to the background.

The three of them had shared from the very beginning the joys and the pains and difficulties always incurred at the birth of a new religious family.

Who are they?

Both of them were from Milan, members of the noble families Ferrari and Morigia, who had given many illustrious members to the “Arts, arms, holiness, and civil and ecclesiastical positions” (Gobbio, 1858). These dignities did not deter neither of them from leaving behind the nobility to serve God and his people.

Both of them were older than Zaccaria who was born in 1502. Ferrari (1499) and Morigia (1497) belonged to the previous century. Anyway, neither of them was to reach 50 years of age, since the youngest, Anthony Mary, died at 37, Ferrari at 45, and, lastly, Morigia at 49. And so the young Congregation lost its first father when only 6 year old, the second at 11, and the third at 13: neither of them had the chance to really shape the new religious family. Think of the Jesuits who had St. Ignatius for 20 years, or the Salesians who had St. John Bosco up to the age of 73.

Another characteristic of Ferrari and Morigia is that right after their death they were venerated as “Blessed.” This can be seen from the paintings of the time. In 1604 Paul Morigia, Prior of the *Jesuata Congregation* (not in existence anymore), in his book “*A summary of Milan's grandeurs*” writes: “Among the Blessed we can count Bartolomeo Ferrari and Giacomo Antonio Morigia, noblemen from Milan and founders (!) of the Congregation of the Clerics Regular of St. Paul



Beheaded, men of exemplary life and full of holiness.” Not surprisingly Zaccaria is not mentioned since he was not from Milan. The reason Morigia is mentioned before Ferrari could be due to the fact that he bore the same name of the author, or maybe because Morigia had been Superior General of the Order before Ferrari.

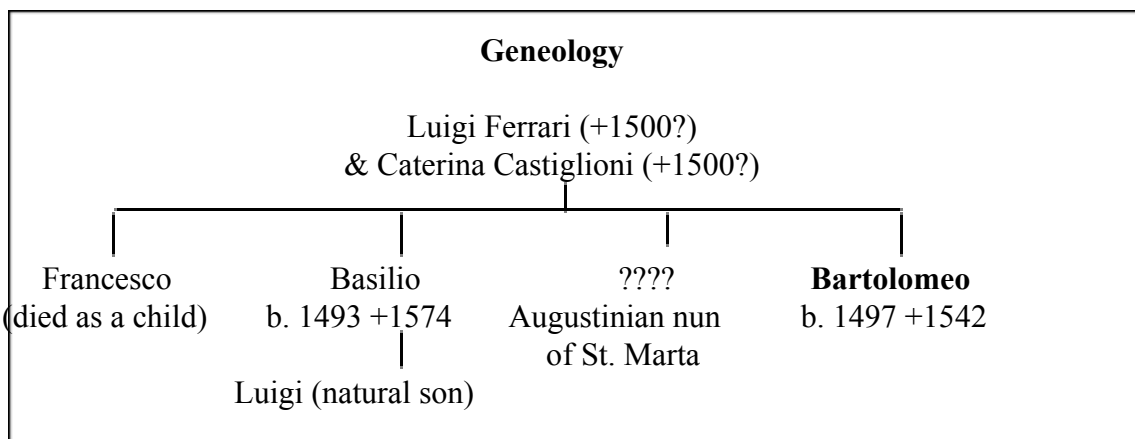
BARTOLOMEO FERRARI

Anyone who reads the Breve of approval of the Order, granted by Pope Clement VII on February 18, 1533, in Bologna, could think that the Founder is Bartolomeo Ferrari: ‘To the beloved sons Bartolomeo Ferrari and Anthony M. Zaccaria, Milanese and Cremonese priests.’ Morigia is not mentioned, Zaccaria is in second place, while Ferrari has the honor to be the one to whom the Breve is addressed.

As we follow the sequence of events we observe that the papal writer and secretary of the Pope was Basilio Ferrari, Bartolomeo’s brother.

Bartolomeo Ferrari was born in 1499 into a noble and wealthy family of Milan. At an early age he lost his father, Luigi, his mother, Caterina Castiglioni, and an elder brother, Francesco. He became an orphan of both parents when only two years old. He was raised with all the Christian principle by his sister who was a nun.

Fortunately, the adverse effect of these deaths on the young Ferrari was greatly alleviated by the loving care and ability of his older brother and legal guardian, Basilio. Surely, Basilio’s task was made easier by his brother sweet and gentle disposition.



Basilio saw to it that his brother received a good education while he himself studied law, probably at the University of Pavia. By the time Bartolomeo was 14, in 1513, Basilio was a notary public, a profession which he practiced for five years. In 1518, the extrovert Basilio, always eager for advancement, became a cleric, but not a priest, with the title of canon in the church of *Santa Maria in Fulcorina*.

Following in his brother’s footsteps, Bartolomeo too, went to the University of Pavia where he obtained a license as notary public. He certainly practiced this profession from July 20, 1521, to May 30, 1531, during a period of great turmoil. This, no doubt, gave him many an opportunity to help people in distress, so that the Senate granted him a public recognition for his merits. He was perfectly happy with the abundant share of paternal wealth granted him by the Milan Senate when his legal guardian, Basilio, left for Rome. The very ambitious Basilio, never a priest, was looking for a successful career in the church. Indeed, in the

Roman Curia he found plenty of prestige, power, and money. He even sired an illegitimate child, Luigi.

Bartolomeo's intentions were quite different. They became apparent when, early in 1521, he sought out the founder of the *Oratory of the Eternal Wisdom*, Giovanni Antonio Bellotti. Within a short time Bartolomeo became an active member of that society. Bellotti, discerning in him signs of a vocation, encouraged him to wear the ecclesiastical garb. He put on a worn black tunic and sold what he had to help the poor. He visited hospitals and helped young orphans and the needy.

Furthermore, in 1522, a few years before Anthony Mary Zaccaria, and fourteen years before Francis Castellino, Bartolomeo began teaching the rudiments of religion to little children, boys and girls, on Sundays and holidays. Incidentally, religious instruction was decreed in the Trent Session of the Fifth Lateran Council in 1514, but nothing had come out of it. Actually the general unrest caused by the rivalries between the Emperor of Spain and the King of France, in which the papacy was deeply involved, was hardly conducive to orderly progress, religious or otherwise.

In 1524 the plague broke out in Milan, and, joined with famine and an invading horde, make the city one of horror, terror, and desolation.

The imperial commander, Charles, Duke of Bourbon, taxed the Milanese literally to death. His mercenaries, quartered upon the inhabitants, so victimized them with robbery, brutality, and rape that many Milanese hung themselves or threw themselves from windows and roofs. City officials took refuge in nearby Monza.

It was people like Bartolomeo Ferrari and Giacomo Antonio Morigia, who met about this time, that remained in the stricken city to help whomever they could. Bartolomeo used his Maddalena residence outside Vercellina Gate as a hospital for the victims. There he had shacks and barracks built as makeshift hospital wards. To help the unfortunate, both young men did not hesitate to avail themselves of their own personal fortunes. These extraordinarily hard times strengthened their friendship, tempered their human and Christian mettle, and braced them for the tasks ahead.

A precious testimony to Bartolomeo's (and, by analogy, Morigia's) increasingly austere and charitable way of life is contained in a letter from Rome written by Basilio on September 24, 1528. Writing from the renewed security and continuing affluence of the papal court, and having survived the horrendous sack of the Eternal City and the plague of the previous year, Basilio pleaded with his brother to cease "despising the good things of life by the way you dress, the plague you live in, the lonely and depressing practices you indulge in, and by your excessive charities." Apparently, taking his membership in the *Oratory of the Eternal Wisdom* most seriously, Bartolomeo had discarded his aristocratic clothes, had left or sold his house, was spending much time in study, meditation and prayer, and was helping the poor as much as he could. Needless to say, Basilio's plea went unheeded.

Furthermore, on January 12, 1530, Bartolomeo made Basilio his heir with the proviso that, should Basilio die before him (actually Basilio outlived him by 30 years), Bartolomeo's estate would go to the General Hospital of Milan. Was he thinking of a priestly and religious way of life? Quite likely. Certainly his action was facilitated by the new tranquility that followed the Treaty of Barcelona, June 29, 1529, between the Emperor and the Pope; the Treaty of Chambray, August 3, 1529, between the Emperor and the King; and the restoration, in the same year, of Francis Sforza as Duke of Milan.

There is evidence that Ferrari and Morigia felt that they should establish a group of their own to carry out the reforms whose urgency was evident to every member of the

Oratory of the Eternal Wisdom. But the havoc of the preceding years had precluded any action. Now their expectations looked more realizable. It was precisely at this time, in 1530, that Battista, Anthony Mary, and Ludovica arrived in Milan. They immediately contacted Bishop Francis Landini and joined his *Oratory of the Eternal Wisdom*. This was the auspicious beginning of the *Oratory* evolution into the Barnabite Order.

In 1530 the *Oratory of the Eternal Wisdom* had been in existence for three decades and was on the wane. The reason was that its founder, Bellotti, died two years earlier, shortly after the death of its most charismatic member, Prioress Panigarola, in 1525. Presently, the Oratory was ready either for extinction or transformation. The people who brought about its transformation were Battista da Crema, Ludovica Torelli, Anthony M. Zaccaria, James Morigia, and Bartolomeo Ferrari.

Bartolomeo's friendship with Zaccaria at the Oratory of the "Eternal Wisdom" - precisely aiming at the founding of a new religious family - induced Basilio, by now a member of the papal court, to support his brother and companions. As he heard that they were looking for the Pope's approval, Basil interceded with the Pope and obtained what his brother desired. It could be said that he got it too soon because Clement VII's Breve reached Milan when the Congregation was not yet established. The absurd actually took place: through the influence of a powerful brother a Religious Congregation was approved before its very existence.

Once the approval was granted, Zaccaria wanted Bartolomeo, who considered him as a father, to be a priest too, even before receiving the religious habit. Bartolomeo Ferrari's ordination to the priesthood must have taken place between 1531 and 1532 since in some notary notes he is addressed as a reverend on August 1531, and as a priest on April 1532, but he waited until September 8, 1534, to celebrate his first Mass in St. Mary's alla Scala. The same year, on August 15, the feast of the Assumption, Bartolomeo had received the religious habit from Anthony M. Zaccaria, and again, under the direction of Zaccaria, he began to practice and to hear confessions. Many had recourse to him for spiritual counsel. He was so dedicated to the welfare of his neighbor and so disposed to help anyone who could benefit from his ministry that he often neglected to eat and sleep.

Now they were ready to work for "the reform of themselves and of others." Other brothers joined them, the Angelic Sisters were ready, the "Espoused" (married lay couples committed to personal renewal and to the apostolate) were available. But the strange life of these three groups started to hit the news front page: many were the accusations brought in front of the city Senate, the Archbishop, the Inquisition, and the Roman See.

After three years of tribulations, peace came back. Fr. Ferrari must have been instrumental because of the influence of his family in Milan, and of his brother in Rome, where he gave a direct clarification of the events.

Finally in 1537 they were able to outline a work-plan. Called to Vicenza, Zaccaria left with Fr. Francis da Secco, but only after a short period he had to go back to Milan to take care of the young Congregation. Fr. Ferrari took his place, and for two years he worked hard preaching, hearing confessions, administering the sacraments, reaching out in Convents, to the clergy, to the people... always at the disposal of the local Bishop, Cardinal Ridolfi.

In 1539 he received the news of Fr. Anthony M. Zaccaria's grave illness, so he rushed at his bedside, and Anthony Mary died in his arms on July 5, 1539, at the young age of 37. Fr. Ferrari arranged for the body to be taken to Milan to be buried in the St. Paul's church of the Angelic Sisters.

The Congregation had lost its Founder, but the work had to go on.

The Superior General, Fr. Morigia, sent Fr. Ferrari to a new mission in Verona. He stayed there until 1542 at the service of Bishop Giberti, bishop of Padua and Apostolic Nuncio in Madrid at the court of Philip II. Fr. Ferrari was assigned to the Misericordia hospital and to the Collegio della Pietà. Many were the missions in the city and surroundings, and immense was the good he left behind when, in 1542, he was called to Milan for the General Chapter.

On November 30, 1542, Fr. Ferrari was called to take Fr. Morigia's place as Superior General. One of his first concerns was to obtain from both civic and ecclesiastical authorities more precise regulations for the newly born religious family. In 1543, Pope Paul III's Bull granted the Barnabites 'To live together, to wear the common ecclesiastical habit, to take the title Clerics Regular, and to share common goods under obedience and our special protection and of this our See.' For his part, Emperor Charles V, from Cremona (he was there on his way to meet the Pope in Busseto to arrange a peace treaty with Francis I) sent Fr. Ferrari a Decree of immunity and exemption for the houses of the Barnabites "in Milan, in the rest of the Milanese territories and in the whole Empire."

We might say that the speed with which Fr. Ferrari moved in petitioning and obtaining the two documents (papal and imperial) was a premonition of his death a year later. During his term new missions were opened in Venice, Padua, Belluno, Brescia, and all of them were visited by him in his last year of life.

Many of the rules which were to become part of the Constitutions were introduced by Fr. Ferrari: rules for the different house-offices, the *collatio* open to the laity too, first requests for "brothers" willing to enter the Congregation without looking for the Priesthood, but ready to do house work in order to leave more freedom to the priests for their ministry.

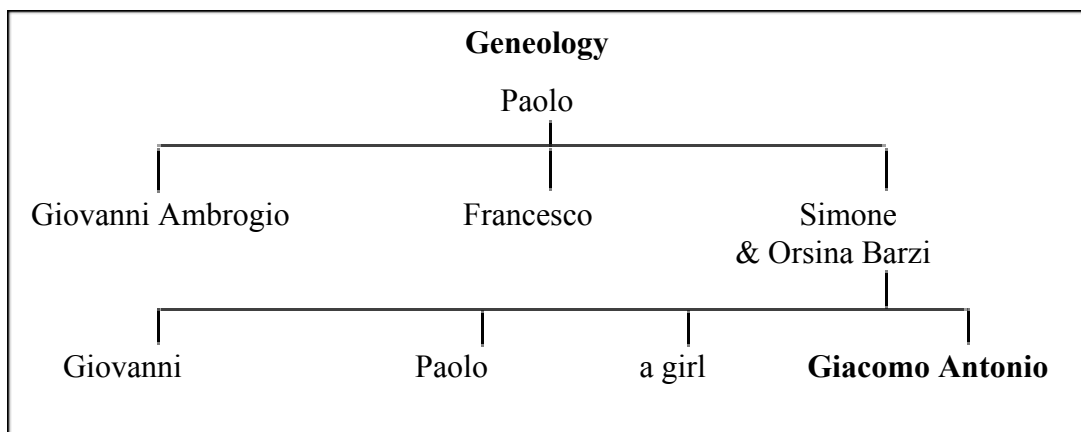
He was also the spiritual director of the Angelic Sisters, and worked for the codification of their rules. Many other convents had him as their confessor.

It is not surprising that Fr. Ferrari fell victim of his own work on November 24, 1543.

GIACOMO ANTONIO MORIGIA

Giacomo Antonio Morigia was the name of two of the early Barnabites. Both men were outstanding in the history of the Congregation: one was the "Co-founder of the Barnabites" (with Zaccaria and Ferrari), the other was the first Barnabite to become a Cardinal a century later (1633-1708), at first Bishop of St. Miniato, then of Florence and later of Pavia.

Here of course we will talk about the first one: Co-founder and first Superior General of the Congregation.



(die as a child)

Abbot of St. Vittore

b. 1493? +1546

Giacomo Antonio Morigia was born in Milan, in 1497, of Simone and Orsina Barzi, a wealthy aristocratic family. His father had died when he was a child. He was reared by his mother and two uncles who lived in their home. He was good-hearted and had a quick mind. He learned readily and would have made great progress if he had been given a proper education. Although his mother was a widow, she was worldly minded and sought to make him an elegant cavalier rather than a scholar. She was only slightly interested in the religious, moral, and intellectual upbringing of her son. After a little more schooling, Morigia was quickly introduced by his fun-loving mother to Milan's high society. Pretty soon horse-riding, hunting, music and the theater became his chief occupations. Gobbio writes: "he loved to ride, the play of arms, light conversation, music, songs, courting, hunting, comedies, perfumes, caring for his hair, exquisite and pompous clothes; he stood way above his peers in this, since the most stylish and dressy fashions were his; and so he was famous among his peers and all others as the gallant and dashing Morigia."

However, it became increasingly apparent that the dashing young man was not entirely attuned to his mother's lifestyle. A definite streak of seriousness and independence, presumably, inherited from his father, began to show. First, on his own, he studied mathematics and architecture for which he had a natural disposition. Secondly, no doubt to his mother chagrin, he declined the fat benefices attached to the Abbey of *San Vittore al Corpo* which his influential friends were offering to him. Instead, he joined the Holy Crown Oratory.

At the age of twenty-five, the restless Morigia was still searching for a firm direction in life. That year, 1522, through some aunts, nuns in Santa Margarita Convent, he met Father Giovanni Buono, a Benedictine of the San Pietro in Gessate Monastery. Morigia was very impressed by the saintly old man. Undeterred by his mother's displeasure and the remonstrances of his friends, Morigia began turning toward a serious Christian life.

Everyone thought this change very strange and it became the talk of the city even in the court of Francis Sforza which, in 1521, Morigia had frequented in pursuit of personal glory.

During the plague of 1524, dressed in a black tunic, with a crucifix in hand, and a rope around his neck, he did his utmost to help the plague-stricken, the poor, and the needy virgins. In return, he was ill-treated and threatened.

Taking Father Bono's advice, he eventually joined the *Oratory of the Eternal Wisdom*. Here he found new friends. One of them was Francesco Landini, the reform-minded Suffragan Bishop of Milan who in 1528 became the second and last director of the *Oratory*. A devout student of Saint Paul's Letters, Landini was a close friend of Battista da Crema, whom he considered an "experienced and learned captain in the field of reform."

Another friend was Bartolomeo Ferrari, and his acquaintance with him led him to Zaccaria whom he decided to join with the hope of realizing that ideal of perfection to which he aspired.

Their common ideals and resolutions took concrete form in the desire to consecrate themselves to God: but only in 1534 was Morigia able to join the other two in common life (this is why the Breve of Clement VII does not mention his name). On August 24, 1534, Zaccaria gave him the religious habit, and on July 4 of the following year he was ordained a priest. On September 14, 1535, after a long and scrupulous preparation, he said his first Mass

and gave himself to the ministry of preaching and confession. He acquired great fame not only because of his charity and zeal, but also for his prudence and concern for those who came to him.

So the trio was complete and the Congregation could start on its journey, relying on the most intimate cooperation among the three: “*funiculum triplex difficile rumpitur*” (it is difficult to break a three-stranded rope), we read in the first chronicles of the Congregation. After 500 years, that solid union started by the first three members is still holding together all the members of the Congregation.

St. Anthony M. Zaccaria was not the first Superior General because he declined the position. When, by Papal decree, a Superior General had to be appointed, he nominated Fr. Morigia: “According to the papal rules, the Venerable Zaccaria wanted to have a legitimate head to govern the Congregation. He ordered to have special prayers for three days to obtain the light of the Holy Spirit; then he called the Fathers in a meeting and he was the first to express his opinion in favor of Fr. Giacomo Morigia, saying that he considered him to be the best of all for the office. All begged him to keep the office for himself since God had given him to the Congregation as its Founder. But the most humble Father was firm in his decision and proposed Fr. Morigia. The Fathers acquiesced and confirmed the choice. And so on April 15, 1536, the first Superior General of the Congregation of the Clerics Regular of St. Paul was officially appointed” (Fr. Gobbio).

Although not forty yet, the first Superior General of the Congregation was the oldest of the three Cofounders, being born in 1497.

We have to say that the first Superior General did know how to play his role, especially under pressure, when Barnabites and Angelics became victims of all kind of accusations. Very wise in the ways of the world, he did insist to bring the trial before a tribunal for a public sentence of absolution. This happened in the August of 1537 when the Barnabites and Angelics were totally acquitted of any suspicion of introducing in Milan (because of their humble and poor style of life) the heresy of the Poor of Lyons and of the Beguines of France.

Of course in 1539, after the death of St. Anthony M. Zaccaria, Morigia’s work intensified: responsibility of the life of the community and of the apostolate of the Congregation (Ferrari was busy in Vicenza to carry on the mission started by Zaccaria). In particular, he cared for the Angelics and the organization of the third family, “The Espoused.” He assisted the Countess Torelli (who had started the Angelic Sisters together with Zaccaria) for the legal transfer of her possessions in Guastalla. He had to consolidate the convent of the Most Holy Crucifix, which later had to be closed for lack of members. But in a special way it was his joy to welcome into the Congregation the new members coming from the various Barnabite missions in the Milanese and Venetian domains. He welcomed into the Congregation Fr. Omodei, Fr. Sacchi, Fr. Besozzi, besides all the Venetian Barnabites who were going to enrich the Congregation with holiness and zeal.

At the end of his six year term, Morigia called a General Chapter to select a successor. His resignation was irrevocable although all the members were pressuring him to stay on, and so Fr. Bartolomeo Ferrari was elected second Superior General of the Congregation.

Fr. Morigia was immediately entrusted with the formation of the novices (at that time all adult vocations, but still in need of a spiritual guide), until November 1544, when at the sudden death of Fr. Ferrari he was again asked to take the leadership of the Congregation. He thought that at the General Chapter held the following year he would be free from the task, but he was unanimously reelected, and so he had to stay on as Superior General.

He personally cared for the reconstruction of the church of St. Barnabas, which had finally being acquired by the Congregation (the process had been started by Zaccaria). An expert in architecture, Morigia provided the blue prints of the church and of the Fathers' residence. On his family property he provided also a rest-home for infirm and tired out confreres, which functioned until the Napoleonic suppression.

In April 1546, after assisting the Governor of Milan at his death-bed, Fr. Morigia took sick with high fever, and died on April 13.

The third Cofounder of the Barnabite Congregation was gone.